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President Ben Shelly Commends Navajo Cowboys



Derrick Begay and Erich Rogers at the Team Navajo Appreciation Dinner at Tuscany Suites & Casino on Nov. 30.

LAS VEGAS, Nev. – Two Navajo professional cowboys were honored Wednesday afternoon at a reception before they began their march in hopes of attaining a world championship.

Erich Rogers of Round Rock, Ariz., and Derrick Begay of Seba Delkai, Ariz., both qualified for the 2011 National Finals Rodeo, which started Thursday at the Thomas and Mack Center.

“We are always proud to see Navajo athletes succeed at the highest levels of competition,” said Navajo President Ben Shelly about the two cowboys. President Shelly made his statement from Washington, D.C. where he was attending meeting with federal officials.

“We want them to know they have our support, as they represent the Navajo Nation during the National Finals Rodeo,” President Shelly added.

To help show their support, the Office of the President and Vice President along with other Navajo Nation Divisions and Departments partnered up with Navajo Enterprises, KTNN and Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise to form Team Navajo to show appreciation to the young athletes for their sacrifice and discipline to the sport of Rodeo.

And two Navajo Nation Council Delegates were on hand to support the Navajo cowboys as well.

“It is always good to see our young Navajos rise through the ranks,” said Council Delegate Jonathan Hale. “These two young Navajo athletes are role models.”

Council Delegate Roscoe Smith agreed with Hale.

“Seeing you two in the NFR makes the Navajo Nation proud,” Smith said, adding that he was thankful to represent President Shelly while Shelly was in Washington.

Also, to express to the athletes how happy and proud they have made the Navajo Nation and its people. Team Navajo gave each athlete saddle blankets and checks to cover travel expenses to the NFR.

Manuelito Wheeler, Navajo Nation Museum director said that he hopes Team Navajo turns into an organization that supports all Navajo athletes.

“Derrick and Erich have planted a seed, a seed, which is Team Navajo. Team Navajo will grow into something larger. One day it may be in place to recognize and support Navajo People who are accomplishing big things,” Wheeler said.

Both Begay and Thomas said they were thankful to the Navajo Nation for supporting them.

Begay, who has qualified for the NFR four times, was ranked number one going into the weekend, and first time qualifier Rogers was ranked number three. They are both team roping headers.

“It’s a scary feeling,” Begay said about being the top ranked header going into the rodeo that ends on Dec. 10.

“It’s a scary feeling being number one coming into the finals this year and everyone is chasing you to pass you, but I have a good feeling because Eric is here with me,” he added.

But in that, he also expressed his gratitude during his speech at the reception.

He said that though he may be from the reservation, but his accomplishments in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association show that “anything is possible.”

For Begay, who qualified for the NFR for the first time, said his experience this year has been worthwhile.

“It’s been a long year. It’s been fun,” he said. “I’m getting to see a lot of things and meet a lot of people. I get to live a dream that I have always wanted.”

That dream translates into being an example for young people who want to attain their dreams, said Frederick White, director of natural resources.

“Derrick and Erich, you are paving the way for others to be champions like you and we want to thank you,” he said.

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